

The Holy catholic church, the commun-
ion of saints / W.W. Spear

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THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH,
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN

ST. LUKE'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

ON

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 1844.

BY WILLIAM W. SPEAR,
Rector of St. Luke's Church.

"THERE IS ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT."

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PREFACE.

THE subject of the following pages was forced upon the author's attention, in a course of Sermons on the Apostles' Creed. As it is confessedly so little understood, he was induced to give it a more than common share of attention. Its position in that summary of the Articles of our faith, first led him to entertain the interpretation here given of its meaning. Aware that it is not the view generally adopted at this day, he proceeded to compare it with "Holy Scripture and ancient authors," and he was rejoiced to find it "proved by most certain warrant" of the former, and sanctioned by the best authorities among the latter.

The view here advocated, is commonly called that of the *invisible Church*. The use of this term, however, has been avoided as much as possible, because it does not correctly express the idea intended. The Church, in the largest sense of the term, is in part visible and in part invisible, for it comprehends those who are militant on earth and those who are made perfect in heaven. The Church on earth is of necessity *visible*, because it is composed of those who are partakers of flesh and blood, who are bound to make confession with the mouth unto salvation, and must needs be associated together, in breaking of bread and in prayers. Here, however, the nominal, or professed Church must be distinguished from the true or real Church. The nominal Church is compared in Scripture to "a net full of fishes, bad and good." But this cannot be "the Holy Church," in which we profess to believe, which is composed only "of such as shall be saved." That portion of the former, which belong to the latter, we cannot certainly distinguish; and hence it is placed among the articles of our *faith*.

This sense of the words visible and invisible, as synonymous with earthly and heavenly, is that sanctioned in the first division of the Nicene Creed; as well as in Colossians, i. 16, where they are expressly used for this purpose. It is recognised by many most respectable writers.* It reconciles the 19th Article with this clause of the Apostles' Creed. That treats of "the visible Church," that is, the Church militant on earth. Yet it speaks of the real and not the professed Church—for it is described as "a company of *faithful* men."



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The notes which are given of it, present a beau ideal, realized indeed, always to our "*faith*," but never exhibited perfectly to our "*sight*." Accordingly, the most celebrated branches of the visible Church are said to have fallen short of it, and they are but illustrations of the truth, that perfection and infallibility are nowhere to be found.†

Our Church is charged with want of spirituality. This doubtless is, to some extent, the result of sectarian prejudice and interest, which sufficiently gains its object by convincing itself and persuading the public, that ours is a system of modified Popery. But the writer is convinced, that the very existence of this prejudice is owing, in no small degree, to the *low* views which many of the modern and popular Expositors of our standards have put forth from the pulpit and the press. The fault is not in our standards themselves, but in our inadequate conceptions of their meaning. Our expositions are of the earth, earthy; our standards are spiritual and heavenly. The former dwell too much upon outward forms, the latter point to living realities. The author means not, indeed, to discard *forms* altogether, for some he believes to be of Divine appointment, and others of highest expediency. But they need to be kept in their proper place; for the undue exaltation of them must sooner or later lead us to depreciate, compromise, and omit "the weightier matters of the law."

The following Sermon in illustration of these views, is published at the urgent request of many Christian friends who heard it with pleasure, and in some degree, in consequence of the gross misrepresentations given of it by others. In preparing it for the press, its matter has been increased, and its positions strengthened, but its sentiments not in the least modified.

The author does not expect or desire any peculiar importance to be attached to this Sermon, as an original composition. But he believes he is doing service to the cause of truth, by introducing to public notice the opinions and testimonies of others, which are most valuable in themselves, but which are inaccessible to his readers in any convenient form. The authors and documents referred to, are derived from the *Reformed* rather than the *Primitive Church*; because it is with the former that we are more immediately connected, and because he is persuaded, that so far as any clear and consistent interpretation could be obtained from the latter, "these two are one."

* See Garbett's Communion of Saints, p. 23, and Manning's Unity of the Church, p. 78.

† See T. Griffith on the XIXth and following Articles.

SERMON.

1 CORINTHIANS, i. 2, 3.—"Unto the Church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,—grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

THE term Church is one, whose very mention is wont to excite more or less of that unhappy feeling, which is the unavoidable result of the present divided state of Christendom. It is the watchword of sectarian strife, and has become itself one of those party names, which divide the Church of God. The introduction of it into the Creed, especially with the title of Catholic, and our declaration of belief in it, as an article of faith, on all occasions of public worship, brings this feeling into constant exercise. Some are offended at the very sound of the words, and wonder how a body of Protestant Christians can recognise at all the "Catholic Church." Others are loth to ascribe to us a palpable inconsistency, and take for granted that the words are capable of a purely Protestant interpretation; but they are at a loss to know what is the meaning which ought to be attached to it. And others again, are found cordially adopting and gladly confessing it, as a part of a form of sound words, delivered to us by holy, though not inspired men of old, who yet understand it in a sense contrary to the intention of those who framed it, and those who transmitted it to us; and who associate with it ideas which, even if correct in themselves, are far below the dignity and sublimity of the object, which it was intended to set before our minds.

But though it be the occasion of this prejudice against us, and division among us, we are far from wishing to avoid the

repetition of it. For we believe that if it were rightly understood, it would be regarded, not only as a great and glorious object of belief, important, yea fundamental in the system of Christian truth,—but also as an article, which instead of being a watchword for strife, would constitute a balm for the Church's wounds, helping us more directly than any other article in this summary of our faith, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It has been observed, by a recent and respected commentator, in reference to the whole Catechism of our Church, "that it was no part of its design to state the peculiar doctrine of any particular Church."* And this must be especially true of the Creed, which is a part of the Catechism, for it was in existence long before any of our present divisions, and is still retained by all, notwithstanding those divisions. It should be known and remembered by all, that this summary of our faith is embodied in the standards of many particular Churches besides our own; even by the Romish and Greek Churches, and all the prominent Reformed Churches in Europe and America. The Presbyterian Church in its Confession of Faith, unites with us in recognising its authority. Hence, though we may be peculiar in the use we make of it in our liturgy, we ought not to be peculiar in the sense we affix to it. And there is one sense, which all who reverence it at all, would be able heartily to adopt, a sense which would awaken in every mind, catholic not sectarian feelings, and be a bond of union, instead of a bone of contention, among "all who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That such may be the result of our meditations at this time, I shall pursue the subject, with as little as possible of the semblance of controversy, with an eye to the spiritual profit and eternal welfare of those who hear me, and in dependence upon the direction and blessing of Him who is head over all things to the Church.

The term Church is a scriptural one, and, therefore, what-

* Dr. Henshaw's Theology for the People, p. 20 Yet his own interpretation of this Article is a violation of this principle. His view of the subject is referred to below. It is, in the author's opinion, one of a few blemishes in an otherwise useful volume. In a catechism recently edited by Bishop Henshaw, the view given of the Article is the same as that here defended.

ever sense was attached to it by those who once framed or have since adopted it, we could not abide by it, unless it were conformable to the law and testimony. Hence, in introducing the subject of this discourse, as usual, I have directed your minds to a particular passage of Holy Writ, hoping to show you in what sense this was *indeed* an article of the *Apostles' Creed*. My text not only contains a warrant for the use of the word, but will also assist us in interpreting its meaning, with reference to the very application we have now to make of it. In searching the Scriptures, I have met with no passage which seemed to me to give so correct and complete an idea of the object presented to our view. *Unto the Church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,—grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

In common discourse, the term Church denotes a building set apart to the worship of God. But it is doubtful whether it is ever so used in the Scriptures, or whether there was any occasion for such an application of it in the first age of the Gospel. It is probable that none of those societies, which were organized by the ministry of the Apostles and continued steadfast in their doctrine and fellowship, were in possession of an edifice where they could worship God, and keep his ordinances. Their place of worship was in their own houses, if, indeed, even there were "none to molest or make them afraid." At most, they could only obtain some upper room for their "breaking of bread and prayers." They sang their praises to God far off in desert places, deep down in caves and holes of the earth. They bore their testimony within the walls of the dungeon, or amid the fires of the stake.

The original word, on the contrary, signifies not the place of an assembly, but the *assembly* itself, the society there con-

* Since this Sermon was composed, the author has been gratified to find this apposite text used for the same purpose, and interpreted in the same sense, by Gordon, in his Lectures on the Catechism, which were published at the suggestion and with the commendation of Bishop Porteus.

vened—the associated body, whose members were called out from among the mass of mankind, and gathered together into one place, or at least brought into intimate connexion with each other. After the gifts of Pentecost were poured from on high, we are told that “the Lord added to the *Church* such as should be saved,” where it means, evidently, the company of the disciples, who were afterwards “called Christians.” These increased so greatly, by the conversion both of priests and people, that they could not have met in one place, even with all the facilities which we enjoy. But though they were so “many members,” they were all “one body,” whence we still read of “the Church at Jerusalem.” Soon, by the wise providence of God, the disciples were scattered abroad, and the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles. Never did they go where the Spirit bade them, and speak as the Spirit gave them utterance, without some hearts being opened of the Lord, and at least two or three being joined together by their doctrine; and they, whether few or many, constituted “the Church of God” in that city or town where they dwelt. At Corinth, multitudes were converted to the faith of Christ, and they constituted “the Church of God which was at Corinth.”

The same term is, in the plural number, applied to the various Christian societies formed in any particular district or country, as the “Churches of God in Galatia.” Sometimes, instead of being confined to any particular locality, the same expression is extended to all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, as in “all the Churches of the Saints.” In one place it seems to be applied, not only to all that were at that *time* living in the faith of Christ, but to all that in future ages, even to the end of the world, should be gathered into his flock. “Hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches,” is the introduction of a prophecy which describes not only “the things which then were,” but “those which should be after,” which embraces the whole course of time, and a part of which seems to have been written especially for *our* admonition, upon whom, in the most emphatic sense, “the ends of the world are come.” But to this universal congregation of Christian disciples, the term Church, in the singular, is most commonly applied, as if to denote their union one with ano-

ther, however distant in place or time. This is set forth as the special object of redeeming love, and the peculiar subject of sanctifying grace. “Christ loved the *Church* and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it unto himself.” “On this rock,” says he, “I will build *my Church*, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

My text covers the whole ground of this explanation. It first presents to us an instance of a local Church, the Church of God which was at Corinth; and then it embraces the *Universal Church*, which is composed of “all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But who are they that are recognised as members of this Church? Are they the real or the professed disciples of Christ? The particular Church here spoken of is said to be composed of those who were “sanctified in Christ Jesus;” and the Churches in general are in another place called “the Churches of the Saints.” It is true, that this Epistle and the rest were addressed to all who “professed and called themselves Christians;” but this was done on the supposition that they *were* what they professed to be. The epithets which Paul applies to them at large, imply vastly more than an external and relative sanctification of professed believers. They are such as he would never have applied to those, whom he knew to be either hypocrites or heretics. The errors and divisions which existed among them, were indeed inconsistent with the perfection of the Church, but not destructive of its being. Where it was otherwise, the very object of his writing was to expose the pretensions of those who had no part or lot in the matter, and to secure their separation from “the communion of saints.”

Of course, then, “all that in every place” are here said to “call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” are *also* supposed to be “washed and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” They are such as call upon him, not in form only, but “out of a pure heart fervently.” “They worship God in the Spirit.” They have not only joined the outward communion of his people, but have come to participate in “the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.” “They rejoice in Christ Jesus” as all their salvation and all their desire. They

put no confidence in any works of righteousness which they have done, or any badges of profession which they have assumed.

"This is indeed," says the excellent Bradley, "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth. This is what God generally means when he speaks in Scripture of his Church. He speaks of it as his bride, his body, his fulness—in short, he applies to it every figure which can express connexion and delight. This is 'the house of God' spoken of in the New Testament; for though each individual believer is called a 'temple of the Holy Ghost,' yet if we would look upon his one great, highest, noblest habitation, we must look to the 'general assembly and Church of the first-born,' the whole number of the redeemed from among men, whether on earth and in heaven—plucked as brands from the burning, preserved from the corruption that is in the world, and formed into one glorious body under one glorious Head, the chief Shepherd and universal 'Bishop of souls.'"

Such being the Church of the Scriptures, let us apply to it the characteristics which are distinguished in the *Creed* "*called the Apostles*."†

This Church is "*Holy*," not merely because nominally separated from the mass of the world, and formally dedicated to God's service, but because its "whole body" and its every member is "governed and sanctified by the Spirit." St. Paul refers to the infusion of his Spirit in his life-giving energy, "the great means of the Church's growth in sanctification—"From whom, i. e. Christ as the living head, the source of nervous energy, the whole body being compacted by that which supplieth every joint, being articulated, organized, and harmonized by that pervading Spirit which is the very marrow of spiritual life."‡ None of its members have indeed "attained, neither are they already perfect," but they are all, i. e. all who are already born of the Spirit, and thus really incorporated into the body of Christ, running the race and pressing

towards the prize set before them. The lust of the flesh "remains in them that are regenerate," and it strives against the Spirit, but still are they "accepted in the beloved," and "accounted righteous for his sake," who has promised "not to weigh their merits, but to pardon their offences." For this Church "Christ gave himself" in a peculiar sense; for though he is the Saviour of all men, he is "specially of them that believe," and he gave himself for it for this very purpose, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it by his Word and Holy Spirit;" which purpose he is fulfilling by his providence and grace, making "all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose;" so that in due time "He may present it to himself, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it may be *holy* and without blemish."

This Church is *Catholic* in the only proper sense of that much abused word. It is "the Church universal," or "the holy Church throughout all the world." It is called so, in contrast with the Jewish Church, which was local and national.

The worship of that Church was confined to one *place*, whither all the tribes of Israel must go up, or towards which all their prayers must be directed. But the hour has come, long since, where neither in the mountain of Samaria, or in the height of Zion, or in any other time-honoured and consecrated place on earth *alone*, must men worship the Father; for "the true worshippers, who worship in spirit and truth," may enjoy the assurance of his presence and blessing, "wherever two or three are gathered together" in the name of the "one Mediator between God and man." The most acceptable worship, perhaps, ever offered at the throne of grace, is that of one solitary righteous man who enters into his closet and shuts his door against all human observation, and there holds spiritual communion and fellowship with the Saviour and his saints, and supplicates "grace and peace" in behalf of "all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

The privileges of that Church were also confined to one *nation*, and a wide distinction separated the stranger who was not of that people, even though he came from a far country to worship the God of Israel. But now the wall of separation is

* Prac. Sermon. Vol. II. p. 307-8. † See the 8th of the 39 Articles.

‡ Griffith on the Creed, p. 310.

removed. The Gospel was at first offered to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but speedily the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles, and to them was given also repentance unto life. The disciples of Christ are not only allowed to receive others into their holy fellowship, but commanded "to bring all nations to the obedience of faith." The people whom he foreknew, and whom he purposed to take out of the world, are redeemed out of every kindred and tongue and people.

These are the characteristics of the Church, of which mention is made in the Apostles' Creed, and to the same we may apply with equal propriety the marks of it, which are distinguished in the Creed called *the Nicene*.

This Church is *One*. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." In Christ Jesus all are "built together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit." God has "knit together his elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of his Son." They are one, not only in name and profession, not only as worshipping in one place, or according to one form of prayer and praise, but in heart and mind, in faith and hope; by virtue of their relation to one common Head; in heartfelt confession of one holy faith; in experience of the influence of one sanctifying Spirit, and in anticipation of one glorious place of rest and enjoyment. In these, strangers can take sweet counsel together, and as at Pentecost, though brought together out of every nation under heaven, they hear each other speak, in the very tongue in which themselves were born, the wonderful works of God. This is "the unity of the Spirit," which binds together those who are far off, which harmonizes those who are widely different in taste and opinion, and even separate in ecclesiastical connections. This is an union, which Christian ordinances do but symbolize, or, at best, are means of promoting; a bond of peace, felt and understood by all who hold the Head, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, Greeks or Barbarians, bond or free, from whatever rank in society, of whatever nation among men, in whatever age of the world; whether, finally, on earth or in heaven,—"all are one" and one for ever.

This Church is *Apostolic* too; not merely in the model of its ecclesiastical polity, much less by virtue of the uninter-

rupted succession of the individuals who have exercised and transmitted its ministry, but in that which, with the writings of the first Apostles and Prophets of the Christian dispensation, and of all the original founders of our *reformed* Church before me, I hesitate not to say it is more easy to identify, more important to attain, and more difficult to preserve, in the essentials of "the *faith*" once delivered to the saints," and once again restored to their possession—the faith which is universally and absolutely necessary to salvation among men, which alone purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and fits depraved man for the inheritance of the saints in light—and that faith written not only with pen and ink in creeds and canons of man's wisdom, nor even in the page of the written Word, which, with all the things of earth, will one day be burned up,—but on the fleshly tables of the heart, there known and read of all candid men, and there abiding ever, in spite of all the efforts of men and devils to obliterate it.

Thus, then, the Scriptural idea of the Church is clearly and consistently embodied in the two Creeds; but is this the idea which was intended to be conveyed thereby to our minds? To ascertain this, let us observe the *connection* of the Article as it stands in the Apostles' Creed, and then compare its language with our *other* standards of faith and worship, together with the testimony of those who must be acknowledged as the masters of our Israel.

It were an error to suppose that the topics embraced in the third division of the Apostles' Creed, are at all separable from each other. They are all intimately connected with the office of the Holy Ghost, constituting, in fact, the chief particulars of the work, which in fulfilment of that office he executes. In the Article of the Holy Catholic Church, the sphere and subjects of his operations are pointed out. In the communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, and resurrection of life, we recognise the privileges of those upon whom he effectually operates. The Catechism tells us that in this third division of the Creed, we "learn to believe in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth all the people of God." The first of these refers to the people of God, whom "he sanctifieth." The rest describe the results

of his sanctifying influence. Let us consider this connexion more closely.

This Article immediately *follows* the belief in "the Holy Ghost." We are told, in one of our collects, that "the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified" by him. Now this is not true of any body of professing Christians; it is true only of those who "are very members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ," and that we are expressly told in the communion service, is "the blessed company of all faithful people," who are made such not by the presence of his glorified flesh and blood, but by the indwelling and operation of his Holy Spirit; who are also "heirs through hope," and that a well grounded hope, of his heavenly kingdom. This Church may well be connected with the Holy Ghost, for we are builded together for an habitation of God *through* the Spirit. This is the temple which he builds, and in which he dwells. In gathering together the lively stones of which it is composed, fitting them for the service of this sanctuary, and building them up into this spiritual house, his great work consists. His office is to promote the increase and edification of the Church, leading those "who profess and call themselves Christians into the way of truth," and disposing them to "hold the faith in unity of spirit and righteousness of life." "It is his office," says Bishop Pearson, "to join us unto Christ, and make us members of that one body of which our Saviour is the Head. Our union with the body and the Head is a spiritual conjunction; and so he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" "The presence of God in the temple of old was manifested by means of the mystic glory which dwelt between the Cherubim, and which designated that temple as the palace of the Most High. Now, what the temple was to Jehovah, that is the Church to Christ,—the sacred sphere in which he manifests his presence. And what that divine glory was to the temple, that is the Holy Ghost to the Church, the mystic medium through which Christ's presence is manifested in the spiritual house of God."*

* Griffith on the Creed, p. 251—2.

Again, this Article immediately *precedes* "the communion of saints." It has been objected, that if the Holy Catholic Church is the mystical body of Christ, it is the same as the communion of saints; and this makes a tautology even in so brief a formulary. Now it is remarkable, that some of the highest authorities regard the two clauses as forming but one Article, the latter being an explanation of the other.^a But without considering them as identical, they are certainly connected with each other. They relate to the same persons, if not to the same thing, viz: the saints or people of God, whom the Holy Ghost sanctifieth, and who, according to our text, constitute the Church. As the one speaks of the communion of saints, the other may be supposed to refer to the *community* of saints. The one refers to their persons, and directs our thoughts to the ground of their election out of mankind, and the circumstances of their incorporation into Christ; while the other refers to their relation and fellowship with each other, in consequence of their union with their common head. This is the first of those privileges, which are mentioned in the remaining Articles, and it is a proof that the Holy Catholic Church is limited to the saints, the people of God, the members of the mystical body of Christ; because none but these can have any part or lot in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of life.[†]

This view of the subject has also the support of the other *authorized standards*, and many of the most *distinguished*

^a Barrow speaks of this as most probable. Works, Vol. II. p. 412, 535. And Jeremy Taylor affirms it positively. Works in 3 Vols. Vol. II. p. 341.

[†] The term Church, as used in the baptismal office, is the same with that which we believe to be referred to here. There we pray that every baptized person *may be* "with the residue of the holy Church an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Where observe, first, it is by no means asserted that a baptized person is already certainly an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, but the contrary is admitted to be possible, else why is it made an object of earnest application; and, secondly, that the residue, i. e. the whole body of the holy Church, are regarded as inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and therefore this Church can only be composed of those who are indeed dead unto sin, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost. "A true Christian man," says the Homily against the fear of death, is "the very member of Christ, the Son of God," &c. May we not add, that none other is entitled to these names, which imply spiritual, not merely ecclesiastical privileges.

divines in the Reformed Church of England. In proof of this, as a general remark, let me quote the language of Leigh Richmond, who may claim the honour of having been the first in our day to revive attention to the long forgotten and almost lost remains of the English Reformers. "Whoever," says he, "will read their works, will find that they expound the Holy Catholic Church in its highest and primary signification, as applicable only to that congregation of faithful and holy men who shall be saved; and that the visible Church is constituted only for the purpose of building up that spiritual house which is, in an emphatic sense, the true Church."^{*}

The author of the 2d Book of Homilies, supposed to be Bishop Jewell, says, that "the true Church is an universal congregation of *faithful* and elect people."[†] One of the Articles describes the Church in the same manner as "a company of *faithful* men."[‡]

Cranmer speaks most distinctly on the subject in his Catechism—"This word Church doth not here betoken a temple builded of timber and stone, but it signifieth a company of men lightened with the Spirit of Christ, who do receive the Gospel. And this Christian Church is a communion of *saints*, i. e. all that be of this communion or company be holy, and be one holy body under Christ their head; and this congregation receiveth of Jesus Christ all spiritual riches and gifts that pertain to sanctification, and these be common to the whole Church of Christ, and every member of the same."[§]

The following is the explanation of this Article of the Creed given in the *Catechism of Edward VI*:—"The Scholar says:

"Before the Lord made heaven and earth, he determined to have for himself a most beautiful kingdom and holy commonwealth. The Apostles and ancient fathers called it *Ecclesia*, a congregation or assembly. To this belong all those who do *truly* fear, honour, and call upon God, applying their mind to holy and godly living, putting their hope and trust in Him, and looking for the bliss of everlasting life." The scholar then asked why this Article follows the belief in the Holy

^{*} Dixon & Smith's Catechism, p. 88.

[†] Fol. p. 27^a.

[‡] See above, p. 4.

Scriptures, and he answers, "these two things are most fitly coupled together, for the other fellowships and incorporations of men are governed by other means and policies; but the Church, which is an assembly of men called to everlasting salvation, is both gathered together and governed by the Holy Ghost: which thing, since *it cannot be perceived by bodily sense* or light of nature, is, for good reason, here reckoned among things that are known *by belief*."

To the same effect, says Hooker,—"Whatsoever we read in Scripture concerning the endless love and saving mercy which God sheweth to his Church, the only proper subject thereof is that Church of Christ, which we properly term his mystical body."^{*}

Jeremy Taylor presents the same view—"Glorious things are spoken of the Church. Now the Church is the body of Christ, but the mere profession of Christianity makes no one a member of Christ; nothing but faith, which worketh by love. Any word may, by consent, mean any thing: and if men agree to call the universality of professors the Church, they may; but they are so only by denomination of law and common speaking, not in mystical union and proper relation to Christ; they are not the house of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost. If, by Church, we mean that society which is the heir of the promises, the body of Christ, then the true servants of Christ are only such; to them only appertain the spirit and truth, promises and graces, privileges and benefits of the Gospel."[†]

^{*} Eccles. Pol. b. 5. sec. 65.

[†] Works in 3 Vols. Vol. II. p. 810.

Many of our divines interpret this Article of a visible organization, but even these admit the other to be the strictest sense and highest application of the terms of the Article. Archbishop Secker speaks of this as "the invisible true Church of Christ." Bishop Pearson acknowledges that this is "that Church to which only absolute holiness belongs." Another writer admits, that "the visible Church is called holy, only by a figure of speech, putting that part, which is truly sanctified, for the whole."^{*} The interpretation of the Article in this sense does indeed require an important qualification of almost all the terms applied to it. The adoption of this two-fold view has occasioned ambiguity, and even inconsistency, in Secker, Pearson, and Beveridge. Leighton, on the contrary, and Usher, adhere to the view here given,

^{*} Burrow's Summary of Faith and Practice, Vol. II. p. 366.

Having thus ascertained, as I hope, the real meaning of this Article, I now proceed to observe the *propriety* and *utility* of professing our belief in it. It is objected, that this is an invisible Church, and that, therefore, "we cannot describe it, or have any knowledge of it."²⁶ True, we cannot describe it as we would a thing of sense, but we can believe it as a well ascertained fact, for "faith is the evidence of things not seen;" and that which is here presented to us is numbered among the objects of our faith. In this view only, indeed, could it be properly embraced among the Articles of our belief, for the existence of the professedly Christian body is a matter of fact which no one doubts, and no one need declare. We might as well profess to believe in the heavens and earth, as in the professedly Christian Church. The "Maker of the heavens and earth" is a proper object of faith, and so is that "kingdom of God" which is within you, which cometh not with observation, and which is not the outward union of the wheat and tares, but the inward and spiritual union of the branches and the vine.

We might, indeed, profess our faith in the *authority* of the visible Church, by virtue of divine appointment, and in its perpetuity, on the ground of divine promise; but the very existence of this mystical body, which is, of course, the primary topic suggested by this Article, is a worthy and glorious object of faith.[†] The framing and building of this spiritual house is a work of the Holy Ghost which "the world cannot receive because it seeth it not," but which Christians, by

and thus make out a simple and consistent interpretation. Is it not most reasonable to regard it in one aspect, to interpret it in one consistent manner?

* Henshaw's Theology.

† "Here, in the Creed, is entreated of the congregation of those whom God, by his secret election, hath adopted to himself through Christ; and as this communion of saints cannot be perceived by our senses, not by any natural kind of knowledge, therefore it is rightly placed among the things that lie in belief."—*Noel's Cat. Barrow II.* 416.

"The object of faith is, that among the mass of those who profess to believe, even in those bodies of Christians most defective in their organization and most corrupt in their doctrine, there is a body of faithful members whom Christ owns as belonging to the Church which is his body, who are now militant on earth, but will soon be triumphant in heaven."—*Churchman's Monthly Review*.

faith in God's word and experience of his grace, know and appreciate. Nominal Christians, as well as the professedly ungodly, walk by sight, not by faith. They know nothing of all that is peculiar to the character, history, and destiny of the people of God. They have entered only into the vestibule of this holy temple; at best they admire only its proportions and decorations; they do not understand its uses, nor participate in its benefits. They have a form of godliness, but in deed, if not in word, deny its power. The kingdom of God, with them, consists in the meats, and drinks, and washings of an outward ceremonial, rather than that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which are the *only* marks of membership in the mystical body of Christ.

As an object of faith, Hooker thus magnifies it—"This body cannot be sensibly discerned by men, for the parts thereof are some in heaven already with Christ; and the rest that are on earth, albeit their persons be visible, and their characters may be to some extent judged by their works, yet we do not certainly and infallibly discern, under that property, whereby they are of that body. Only our minds, by intellectual conceit, are able to apprehend that such a real body there is—a body collective, because it containeth a huge multitude—a body mystical, because the mystery of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense. The marks which distinguish those who are of *this society*, are known only to God, who seeth their hearts and understandeth their secret cogitations."²⁷

We believe, moreover, in the *perpetuity* of this Church, as well as its existence: for it is to this Church especially, if not alone, that the promise is made. We believe that "the Church shall live, though Churches are born and die." We look back through the generations that are past, and see that the Lord

²⁶ "One of our most distinguished divines has not scrupled to call this 'a more abstraction, an unreal union.' Alas! that a master in Israel should know so little of these things of the Spirit of God, or rather be constrained, by a theory, to deny that I cannot but hope he does know. By his own confession, it would appear that 'he cannot receive these things of the Spirit of God, because he seeth them not.' Would not the Apostle have been constrained to say to such—'I could not write to you as spiritual, but carnal, even as unto babes in Christ?'"

has ever been with those who called upon his name. He has taken away the candlestick of many a Christian society, but he has never left himself without witness. He has not yet brought his ark into the promised land, but he has protected it in the wilderness, and blessed those who suffered it to pass through their borders in peace. And so will it be in time to come. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against it. The gates of hell shall never prevail against it, for it is founded on a rock, "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, *groweth* to an holy temple in the Lord." The work may be greatly hindered, but never shall it be abandoned "till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." In the fulness of time he shall gather together the whole of his dispersed sheep; he shall "accomplish the number of his elect;" he shall hasten the coming of his kingdom," and in his own person "bring forth the head-stone" of the glorious edifice, while the innumerable company of holy angels and redeemed men shall unite in "crying, grace, grace unto it."

This view of the Church is as *safe* and salutary, as it is Scriptural and appropriate. "It tends," says Leigh Richmond, "to guard us against those untenable conclusions, into which some modern writers fall, from their ascribing to its external constitution, those privileges which are indeed inseparable from the true spiritual Church, but which only appertain to any body of professing Christians, so far as it contains a portion of the true Church. According as it is deemed on Scriptural ground to do so, according as it is found to be adapted to "the edifying of the body of Christ," it may claim an interest in the titles of true, Holy and Catholic. "Christ," says Bishop Sumner, "is Head over all things to the Church, and has promised to be present by his Spirit to the end of the world. Let us beware, then, of ascribing to the body, or any of its members, a power which really belongs to the Head. If we speak of the ark of Christ's Church, we must remember that we are speak-

ing metaphorically, for Christ is the true ark, prepared of God to the saving of all who come to the knowledge of the truth. The ministrations of the Church are the door by which the community of the faithful on earth is entered; and so far as they are conformed to Apostolic precept or precedent, we do well to use them as means of grace; but Christ is the only door by which heaven is entered. The members of the Church are branches of the vine, but the Church is not that vine, that name belongs to Christ alone. The Church is the pillar and ground of truth, but it is not the truth, nor has it life in itself; Christ is the way, the truth, and life, through which every individual must seek access to God. We must not confound outward Church membership with faith, or so magnify the office of the ministry as to suppose that there is no salvation without their instrumentality."*

Will it be said that this view of the subject excludes all idea of ecclesiastical polity, ministerial authority, and sacramental privileges? I answer no. The very names I have mentioned, are enough to prevent any candid hearer from such a misconception. And yet there is great need of adhering to the letter of the Scripture in regard to them, so as not to "go beyond the word of the Lord."

Two positive appointments are there made, and therefore we declare them to be generally necessary to salvation, yea, absolutely necessary to those who are aware of their obligation, and favoured with an opportunity of receiving them. A ministry, also, is of greatest importance to the prosperity of the Church, and hence divers orders were given by inspiration of God "for the perfecting of the saints."†

But the *constitution* of the ministry we believe to be not prescribed in the same manner as the sacraments, in the Scripture, nor placed on the same footing in our standards. Nevertheless, it is a universal sentiment in our borders, that the Epis-

* Charge, 1841.

† As a matter of decency and order, the administration of sacraments, and of all holy offices, is to be conceded to them, so far as they are able to perform them. Necessity only would justify others in superseding them. But it is a wise maxim, too long forgotten, but lately revived under high authority among us, "that the minister is of the *order*, not the essence of a sacrament." Hopkins' Letters, p. 8.

copal form of government is both most nearly conformed to the pattern of the Scriptures, and best adapted to the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ. None have the least desire to change it, all have a growing determination to preserve it. In truth, however, we apprehend more injury to this good cause from its friends than its opponents, lest the false claims which are sometimes urged in behalf of it, as absolutely essential to the being, and universally effectual to the preservation of a Church, should throw into the shade, and bring under odium, those moderate pretensions, which alone are set forth in our standards of faith and rules of order, and which alone can stand the test of a candid examination.

After all, we believe much more than the apostolic constitution of the ministry to be essential to the *perfection* of a body, that calls itself the Church of Christ. We need the fulness of apostolic doctrine, the fervour of apostolic zeal, and the depth of apostolic love,—pervading the hearts and minds of all those who “have received part of this ministry.” Brotherly love and faithful discipline were mentioned by the first reformers as notes of a true Church,* but these bonds of peace and of all virtues, we must acknowledge, are sadly relaxed among us at this day.

My hearers, I would fain make this discourse instrumental both to the *increase* and *edification* of the body of Christ, and therefore,

1st. I beseech you to ascertain whether you are *members of the Holy Catholic Church*. I address this inquiry to all who hear me, whether you are within or without the pale of a nominal Christian profession. I suggest it as a serious question, especially to those who call themselves Christians, because they are especially in danger of “trusting in lying words, saying the temple of the Lord, &c. are these.” Beware, brethren, lest you rest in outward names and notions, ecclesiastical privileges, and periodical services, while destitute of that which enters into the *essence* of the true Church of Christ. Vain, and worse than vain, will be our union with the purest and most perfect of those Churches over which Christ rules,

* Catechism of Edward VI.

if we do not by means of this union, attain and preserve a spiritual communion with Him who is the Head over all things to the whole Church, and who has appointed all the means of grace for the edifying of his mystical body.

“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Are you then possessed of, and animated by, that life-giving Spirit?—Are you pervaded by that which supplieth every joint; are you conscious of this effectual working in the measure of every part? Examine yourselves, prove your own selves. Look for the practical manifestations of this presence in your heart and life. The Spirit himself is inscrutable, but the *fruit* of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. It is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable with God.

To all who are ready to avow or constrained to confess, that they “have no part or lot in this matter,” I address a word of exhortation, and beseech you not to rest till you *are* members of the Holy Catholic Church. “In this Church,” says Archbishop Usher, “no soul can be lost, out of it none can be saved.” By nature, brethren, you are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, outcasts from God, children of the wicked one, heirs of sin and shame. By grace you are invited to become fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. Come out of the world that lieth in wickedness, and join yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to him in sincere contrition, abide in him with a steadfast faith, and you shall have power to become the sons of God. You shall attain remission of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified. “Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.” Thus shall you be joined to this blessed company, and continue in this goodly fellowship. You shall be reckoned among that great “family in heaven and earth which is named of him,”—be joined, even here, in spirit, to the general assembly and Church of the First Born, which are written in heaven, and come at last in person to that great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, who stand before the throne,

and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, crying with a loud voice, salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb.

2. If you profess to have become members of the Church of Christ, cultivate the *communion of saints*. By this I mean not visible unity merely. "The Church is undoubtedly one, but not as a society. It was from the first composed of distinct societies, which were called one, because formed on common principles. The circumstances of its one common head, no more make the Church one Society, than the circumstance of all men having the same Creator, renders the human race one family."

Nor must we be over anxious for perfect *uniformity* any more than for visible unity. "We must not fever ourselves because all God's servants don't think alike, and feel quite alike. We must not be angry with our fellow Christians, because they are not exactly like ourselves. Out of this diversity will ultimately spring beauty and perfection, but that is God's concern; ours is to be right ourselves in all things, to bear with others where they differ from us, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."[†]

Do we hear of *imperfect* Churches? Alas! what tribe of the nominal Israel shall profess to "have attained or to be already perfect" in theory or in practice, and which of them all shall not be required to "pull out the beam out of their own eye, before they can see clearly to pull out the mote from a brother's eye."

One of our wisest seers and most holy men, whose praise is in the Churches of England and America,[‡] has expressed the conviction, "that the unity of the true Catholic Church is

* Encycl. Metrop. apud Griffith, p. 230.

† Bradley's Prac. Serm. V. II. p. 213.

‡ Bickersteth—Preface to D'Aubigne's Oxfordism.

The very week after these pages were written, the author received a copy of Bickersteth's last work, "The Promised Glory of the Church," and was thankful to find a striking coincidence between this writer and himself, in almost every point here referred to. There is no man on earth with whom he more desires to be found "likeminded," than Edward Bickersteth. The following is his language:—"It is not Episcopal ordinations in unbroken succe-

more and more manifesting itself: that true Christians are finding out their oneness, however separated by outward forms and circumstances, by differences of sects, languages, and countries." We trust that the sanguine hope may not be disappointed. We know that it shall not ultimately fail. But surely the great adversary of souls, who is the great separator of the brethren, will strive hard to defer its accomplishment. It is against this true Church of Christ, and the unity of Spirit among its members, that his malice is excited, and his power arrayed. To distract and confound it, to impede its growth, to defile its purity, defeat its plans, is the great end he has in view. The outward unity and vast extension of the visible Church is no grief to him, for he knows, that instead of being the temple of God, the Church of Christ, it may be made "the synagogue of Satan." But the unity of the Spirit, the charity that rejoiceth in the truth and continues steadfast in the faith, though so goodly a sight to the children of God, is the great eyesore of the prince of darkness.

To withstand his wiles, therefore, we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and labour for the things that will promote it. We must contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, but we must take heed that we speak the truth in love. It must needs be that offences come; but let them not come by means of our pride or prejudice, our sensitiveness for ourselves, our uncharitableness towards others. These infirmities often "remain in them that are regenerate," to an extent of which they are themselves unconscious. They are "spots" of deep disgrace and extensive injury "in our feasts of charity." How eagle-eyed are we to discern the defects, how blind to the excellences of those "who follow not us;" how swift to speak evil of others, how averse to candid criticism upon ourselves, and how quickly "overcome of the evil" of false accusation against us. How slow to perceive that others have received the Holy Ghost as well as we; to rejoice that every

sion, it is not a peculiar form of worship, nor the sacraments administered by certain persons, nor yet any of the peculiarities opposed to these, in which any denomination may make their boast. Jesus Christ is the sum and substance of the Scriptures, and faith in him, living, purifying, is the mark of a Christian, and the bond which binds him with his fellow Christians."

way Christ is preached; to pray for grace to be with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Oh! let Judah no longer vex Ephraim and Ephraim envy Judah. Let the murmurings of the Grecians against the Hebrews be stopped by mutual forbearance and concession. Let Paul and Barnabas depart asunder or continue separate, if, through human infirmity on either side or on both, they must do so, but let them not cease, in their selected sphere of operations, to strive together for the faith of the Gospel. We have one Father, one Saviour, one Sanctifier: we are fighting the same enemies, pursuing the same objects, waiting for the same blessed hope, and are soon to enter, with each other and the Lord, into the kingdom prepared for all those who love his appearing. The communion of saints unites us to the whole Church of Christ, visible and invisible, i. e. militant on earth and triumphant in heaven. But "if we love not our brother whom we have seen, how shall we love" those "whom we have not seen?" This communion or love will continue when we ourselves have passed from among the redeemed on earth, and are joined to those who are perfected in heaven; and our exhibition of this "fruit of the Spirit" here, is our only earnest of the inheritance of the saints hereafter.

In conclusion then, I exhort you, brethren, "grieve not that Holy Spirit, whereby ye *are sealed* to the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and evil speaking be put away from you, and be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God for Christ's sake, *hath forgiven* you." May the God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole body, soul and spirit, be preserved blameless, unto the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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the communion of saints
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